

Fourth Oral History Interview

with

ABRAM CHAYES

July 9, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Eugene Gordon

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GORDON: This is a Kennedy Memorial Library recording, dated the 9th of July, 1964, of Abram Chayes, whose voice you will now hear saying. . . .

CHAYES: This is Abram Chayes. I am the interviewee in this session and Dr. Gene Gordon who has just spoken is the interviewer.

GORDON: Okay?

CHAYES: Yes.

GORDON: Abe, you were commenting on how busy things were in the summer of 1961. How did the Berlin crisis look from where you sat?

CHAYES: Well, to start with your first point. That's true, I was just reviewing this day by day chronology of

the headlines of the New York Times, that was prepared for this oral history project for the summer of 1961, and it is incredible, when you think actually of what was going on at that time. The summer began, or the spring ended, with the convocation of the Laos Conference. I suppose you also have to remember that the Bay of Pigs happened in April. George Ball said, "April is the cruelest month. The Bay of Pigs happened in April." There was the Laos Conference that started at the end of April or beginning of May. The President met [Nikita S.] Khrushchev at the beginning of June. That led into a full-fledged Berlin crisis, also contemporaneous with the Laos Conference, which itself--the Berlin crisis that is--involved a stepping up and an increase in our defense expenditures and in the readiness of our defense establishment. It came to a head, I would suppose, in mid-August in the Wall; two weeks later the Russians resumed atmospheric testing of atomic weapons and two weeks after that Secretary General [Dag H.] Hammarskjold

died in a plane crash in the Congo and that precipitated the great troika fight in the U.N. Well, when you think of all of this going on at once-- these were really a whole series of major foreign policy crises, more than crises, if you think of crisis as a sort of temporary heating up of a normally dormant problem; these involved the most fundamental kinds of matters in East-West relations. Really it was a period of overt basic testing between the U.S. and the Soviet Union after Kennedy's election.

GORDON: You know it is almost as though they were really testing his mettle that summer.

CHAYES: Well, maybe. It may very well have been true. You know you never can quite interpret what the other side is doing and that may certainly have been true.

GORDON: Was there any feeling like this in the Administration at the time?

CHAYES: Oh yes. I think there was. I think everybody felt that at Vienna, for example, Khrushchev was really being tough to see what kind of reaction he would get out of Kennedy.

Well, I just wanted to set the scene of the Berlin crisis a little bit because somehow one thinks of these things in isolation. You think of the Berlin crisis as something different from the resumption of testing or something different from the Laos talks. And of course they are different, although they may be linked in some other way. And even when you were working on these you didn't see because the thing is extended in time when you are working on it day by day; you didn't see how much, really, was piling up on us. At least I didn't have the vivid impression that I got today by just reading through these headlines of how much of fundamental importance was happening in those three months.

But, going back again to the attitude that Kennedy came to Washington with, and many of his advisers as well, I would characterize it as one of some openness and willingness to explore possibilities of new agreements, new accommodations, new approaches to East-West relations to try to get them

down on a level where they were controllable, where they were back in the realm of diplomatic discourse, where there was an ability to talk with a certain amount of frankness about problems, which if they weren't common problems, were problems we each faced in our own way in our position in the world. I think there was a great deal of that in the early days of the Kennedy Administration. It was exemplified in disarmament and in the attitudes of a number of people around Kennedy, [Jerome B.] Jerry Weisner particularly, Arthur Schlesinger obviously, and I'm not sure just where [McGeorge] Mac Bundy was then, but I would think he was certainly willing to contemplate some sorts of exploratory moves toward the Soviets. Carl Kaysen had not yet come down; That is, I guess he had not come down permanently, but maybe he was there from time to time. Henry Kissinger was down.

GORDON: Carl Kaysen is who?

CHAYES: Carl Kaysen ultimately became Mac Bundy's deputy in the National Security Council staff and was, as the

Administration moved on, a very prominent and important adviser to the President in the area of National Security affairs. He was a Harvard economics professor. It is amusing--Carl was away in Greece during the academic year 1959-1960, so when he came back in the fall of 1960, just before the election, he hadn't been through this whole process of conversion that I talked about that went on in the academic community. And he was very hostile to Kennedy during the election campaign and just barely brought himself to vote for Kennedy. I remember, in particular, one bitter evening in our living room where we had come back from some other party or play or something, and Carl ranted for a long time in the most vituperative language about Kennedy and Catholicism. He really made a very sharp point about that; he said he was prepared on that issue not to vote for Kennedy. But there can't be any more wholehearted, warm, deep admirer of Kennedy than Carl now. And of course, as I say, he played a central part in the Administration from the time he came down, which must have been about that summer. He started coming down pretty regularly

To get back to Berlin, as I say, when Kennedy came into office there was certainly a general feeling of openness about approaches toward the Russians. . And when the Berlin crisis began even, which was after the Vienna meeting with Khrushchev, there was still among some people the feeling that it would be possible to bring American and Western policy

to the acceptance of a central European settlement, on terms which were really rather different than anything that has been contemplated or stated publicly since. There certainly were a lot of people close to the President, and the President himself, who were thinking intellectually in those terms. I'll go into some detail about that as we get on tonight. What I want to say now is that in retrospect it is clear to me that that was an illusion. There wasn't any possibility of a new settlement.

And I think again in retrospect we should look at that spring of 1961. It was a shattering kind of spring in terms of the hopes and ideas and directions of many of us in the Administration and, I believe, the President himself. I think I said in another one of these interviews that it took the President two years to get back to the American University speech, which I think really represented his basic attitude towards the cold war and towards the problems of East-West relations--the attitude that he had before he came to the Presidency and that he came to the Presidency with, that he wasn't able to

express really until the summer of 1963.

Well, what happened. First what happened was the Bay of Pigs which I believe had two very devastating effects. First, I think it gave everybody, including the Russians, the sense that there wasn't a totally responsible team in charge here, that they were erratic and you couldn't really predict what was going to happen and therefore you better be pretty darn rough to make sure they didn't do something irretrievable. That was one thing. Secondly, I think the Russians could not possibly understand why, having undertaken this and gone and done what we did, we didn't finish it off. That, I think, raised at least the possibility in the minds of many Russian leaders that there was some failure of nerve here to be played upon. And third, it really shattered the morals of the Administration in a way. The first three months or so of the Administration, everything was great. We were flying; we had the sense we couldn't do any wrong. Everybody had the great sense of elan and enthusiasm and delight that here we were and we were doing what we said we would

do and things were looking well in the sense of teamwork and cohesion--all of that was fine. And then we just fell flat on our faces. And in some way we never recaptured that sort of youthful, adventurous spirit. It sobered us and made us probably wiser and better in some ways, but it also touched a vital nerve within the Administration.

GORDON: What were the relations with the Russians like before the Bay of Pigs?

CHAYES: Well, there were some very, very tentative feelers. We didn't really care, so far as I remember. Now I might. . . .

GORDON: Wasn't the meeting at Vienna before that?

CHAYES: No, no. The Bay of Pigs was in April; the Vienna Conference was in June. There was the slow move to the Laos Conference, which was on the whole relatively--well, I was going to say relatively favorable; I don't think it was favorable, but at least it seemed to move into negotiation one major area of confrontation and that was in one sense hopeful. Movement toward a conference, in fact, was going on

all through March, April and into May. In other words, it was the background to the Bay of Pigs.

But then the other thing that occurred was the Vienna meeting. And I think the Vienna meeting, which was the beginning of the Berlin crisis, was a disaster for East-West relations. It was billed as an exploratory meeting. There was nothing on the agenda, nothing to settle, nothing to solve, but at the same time, coming after the Bay of Pigs and being the first face-to-face, indeed the only face-to-face meeting, I guess, between Kennedy and Khrushchev, an immense spotlight on it, not very well prepared in the sense that there wasn't much possibility of real give and take. It was a three day meeting in Vienna, an enormous spectacle.

Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy had just come from Paris where they had been entertained and welcomed in a style that was something out of Louis XIV. You remember [Charles] DeGaulle put on a great festive banquet at Versailles. I remember I went to Paris that weekend. I was in Geneva with [W. Averell]

pression of the other, and the consequence was two years of trying to fight your way out of it.

Khrushchev at that meeting in Vienna delivered a memorandum on the Berlin situations to Kennedy pointing towards the separate peace treaty idea at the end of the year. And that ushered in--that was the opening stage of the Berlin crisis.

GORDON: You say pointing towards--was it an ultimatum? It certainly was regarded as such by the newspapers here.

CHAYES: I think you would have to say it wasn't an ultimatum in the strict sense, saying you do this or else. But it did set a rigid timetable and had the effect of immediately intensifying, precipitating a serious crisis about Berlin. I remember I had been talking to a young man, a brilliant, somewhat rigid young man, in the French Foreign Office in Geneva, one of the very outstanding younger people in the Foreign Office named Maurice,, and even before Vienna he expected the summer to be a Berlin summer and advised me to bone up on my Berlin background. But once this memorandum was delivered that did it. That precipitated a crisis, then and there.

Two things happened back home. I think I got home the first week in June; I had been in Geneva most of May, and I got home very quickly after the President got home. Maybe even before he did, I'm not sure. But the first thing that happened was that the State Department performed miserably. It took us about six weeks to produce a note in response to the Russian memorandum. The note that we finally produced said nothing that hadn't been said before over and over. In fact, it was a scissors and paste job out of documents that had been used in the 1959 and the 1958 Berlin crises. So there was absolutely, as I say, no original thinking. But despite that, the Department ground around and around its own juice for six weeks before it could get an answer. The answer not only didn't have anything new in substance, but was turgid and more Stalinist than the Soviets in style, and the President was totally disgusted with it.

And so that very moment, one might say, was a low point in the sense of confidence between the President and the Department.

Meanwhile the President, perhaps reflecting some of this, asked [Dean G.] Acheson in mid-June or toward the end of June to propose recommendations for the response to this Berlin situation. And Acheson prepared a study which had his usual brilliance about it, but which many of us thought was a seriously dangerous proposal. The basic premise was that this was a test of will between us and the Soviet Union, that there was no reality to the dispute at all, that the Soviets had precipitated the dispute in order to test our will to resist, and therefore we had to demonstrate that we did have the will to resist. He said that ultimately this meant demonstrating that we were prepared to use nuclear weapons in defense of the Berlin crisis. Then he explored a number of ways of demonstrating this intention, all of which involved escalating the crisis, intensifying the crisis to the brink of war. There was no question about it.

GORDON: I don't know what you mean.

CHAYES: Well, calling up a lot more troops, declaring a national emergency, dispositions and deployments of

strategic forces. . . .

GORDON: You mean specifically strategic nuclear-type . . .

CHAYES: Strategic nuclear forces. You know, a whole series of very war-like demonstrations designed. . . .

GORDON: Quickly, we ultimately did respond in something like what Acheson. . . .

CHAYES: Well, yes, except nothing near as extreme as the course of action that Acheson proposed. Moreover, Acheson's total point was that we should not offer or not take the position that we were prepared to negotiate anything. There was nothing to negotiate. Acheson's position was that until the test of wills had been decided there was no possible negotiation and that any indication that we were prepared to enter into any kind of talks was itself a sign of weakness which would undermine us in a test of will. After the will had been broken, one or the other had been broken, then you might enter on negotiations, but that would be simply to verify or to validate in written form what had already been proved by the confrontation of wills.

GORDON: To go back for a minute to the State Department's note, you implied but didn't say that there really wasn't dialogue between the President and the State Department during those six weeks.

CHAYES: Well, there was some dialogue, but it was all about the Acheson proposal. And it was with the Secretary and [Robert S.] McNamara. But essentially the operating machinery, the working machinery of the Department, was not well engaged in this dialogue because it was all wrapped up in the efforts to produce an answer to this note. Foy Kohler, who was then Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, was the head of the group that worked on it. He spoke to the President with the Secretary on the Acheson matters and so on, but there is no doubt that this was a low-point in the relations between Foy and the President. Now the President thereafter recovered a good deal of his respect for Foy and eventually appointed him Ambassador to Moscow, which he would have done

GORDON: Right after that . . .

CHAYES: Well, no, I was going to say he wouldn't have done it

for a person in whom he did not have confidence, but he certainly didn't have very great confidence, nor did the White House staff generally, have great confidence in Foy at this time. And it wasn't a very good performance. The Department did not pull itself together and work as it ought to have done to serve the President.

Acheson reported towards the end of June and there was then a great fight inside the Government, with the participation of some Congressional leaders, [J. William] Fulbright and [Michael J.] Mansfield, on the issue of the Acheson program. Here again, this is where I began to get into the operation. The Department really didn't agree with the Acheson program. They thought it was much too extreme, much too radical, much too doctrinaire a kind of response. And the Department wanted to soften it in a lot of ways. Not basically. Foy Kohler was basically an Achesonian. Paul Nitze in the Department of Defense was basically an Achesonian. The Secretary, I think, was less sharply Achesonian. George McGhee on the

Policy Planning staff was quite unsympathetic to the Achesonian approach. And one or two others. I am trying to remember who else. [Chester A.] Bowles, of course, but he was not very heavily involved in this thing. I remember there was a week or two weeks between the submission of this report and its consideration in the National Security Council. And I really do think in this particular phase of it I had quite a role to play.

George McGhee and I wrote a memorandum which went into the State Department Task Force that was working on the Acheson report. It argued that there had to be a negotiating alternative here, that we couldn't just come in with a military response. We didn't have the negotiating alternative very well worked out--what we would negotiate about or even the procedural steps--but I did write an argument for it. Then I remember a meeting of the Task Force in which Acheson was at his imperious and cutting best. The Task Force decided that they would assign me to write out the negotiating alternatives and scenario, as they called it, and Acheson turned and

said--well he didn't have any objection to that but--"Abe," he said, "you'll see. You try, but you will find that it just won't write." It is pretty hard to stand up to that guy in a meeting of this kind. But I felt some sense of triumph in having done so.

GORDON: I gather you had previous contacts with him.

CHAYES: Oh, I knew Acheson from my old days in Covington and Burling.

GORDON: That is what I thought.

CHAYES: And through [Felix] Frankfurter and so on. I think we both had a sort of admiration for each other, despite our basic distrust of each other. I have no question that he and I were not on the same line in this or in many other elements of policy. I remember at that time [Joseph W.] Joe Alsop was another person who thought that the fate of the Republic was at stake, that unless the President declared a national emergency and made an all out military response and so on, this was going to be the end of the cold war; we were going to lose the

cold war. And he came up to see me and talk to me about it. He wrote a couple of columns in which I was mentioned as among the soft-boiled egg heads, I think he called them, in the State Department. We had a long argument in my office, and I walked him to the elevator. I remember standing there in the elevator, and he said that anybody who gave the President the kind of advice I was thinking about was irresponsible and derelict in his duty. He didn't quite say treasonous, but he certainly meant it.

GORDON: It was certainly the tone of his article, as I remember.

CHAYES: What I was going to say is, a critical point in the consideration of the Acheson proposal came at a meeting in Hyannis Port of the President, [Dean] Rusk and McNamara--the three of them alone, I think maybe Mac Bundy was there--on one weekend in early July. The following Monday or Tuesday the Security Council was going to meet to consider the proposal. And that weekend two things happened. I remember going over to the White House in a greak funk that there

hadn't been any really well-developed State Department position to offset the Acheson plan--you couldn't stop something with nothing--and talking in great despair to Arthur Schlesinger and Henry Kissinger who were there. Henry Kissinger, as you know, did not generally support the President's European policy, but on this point it was clear that there had to be something other than just a response in terms of force and in terms of escalation of the pressures. Well, we spent a long lunch talking about it and worrying about it and so on. And then Arthur said, "Why don't we get a paper to the President?"

We found out that the helicopters were going to leave at 3:30 or something from the White House lawn. We got back in Arthur's office at about 2:00 or 2:15 and we talked out the scheme of the four or five page memorandum which we would send to the President which in effect was a set of questions which he should ask Rusk and McNamara and satisfy himself on or questions that would provoke discussion. And I will never forget. . . .

GORDON: I assume that copies of memoranda like this are all available. . . .

CHAYES: Well, I suppose--I don't know if I have copies of the memorandum myself. I hope that somewhere--I am sure that in the President's files it is there. We just got this memorandum to the helicopter and it went into the President's briefcase. I remember I got the sense of what a tremendous value Arthur was, let's say on a campaign train or something like that, where you had to work under enormous pressure, because by the time we had the memorandum half outlined, not fully outlined but half-outlined, Arthur sat down at his typewriter on his desk in his office, a cigar in his mouth, and began typing on the typewriter a memorandum for the President. And then just typed out one page after another and this was a five-page memorandum. When he got down through the part that we had worked out, Henry and I had been talking and outlining the rest of the memorandum while he was typing the first part and the tempo was furious because Henry and I were arguing about the subsequent

part of the memorandum while he was typing the first part. As each page would come out he would give it to Henry and me to revise and then hand it to his secretary to be typed in final form and he did this with the most, the gayest air of buoyancy, you know, and without any sense of pressure or urgency or anything, except that there he was typing away.

GORDON: Probably with considerable eloquence and lucidity.

CHAYES: Oh, that is exactly right, the thing came out beautifully. You know, the kind of prose that it is very hard to write even after. . . .

GORDON: Five revisions.

CHAYES: Exactly. So you can see what kind of guy this was on a campaign train or something like that, and in this case, well, we got the memorandum into the President's briefcase and then sort of flopped down and relaxed and said, "Well, now what can we do next?" I said, "Why don't we get the Secretary of State a set of answers to these questions or a memorandum which would prepare him for answering these questions?" And so I went back to the. . . .

GORDON: You felt that Rusk was your spokesman, the spokesman for this feeling. . . .

CHAYES: Well, it was clear, as I said that the Department as a whole was not committed to the Acheson line. Rusk is not himself an adventurer. He is always in favor of diplomacy, although he understands the relation in some ways of military force to diplomacy. On the other hand he is not a brinksman. And he has always believed, you know, in the tight corner he was always for talking. If you can talk. . . .

GORDON: And at this point the Russians made no particular threat of force.

CHAYES: No. There was no threat of force. They were just saying, "We're going to sign the peace treaty and when we sign the peace treaty then you'll have to deal with the East Germans for your access and your rights and so on," you know.

GORDON: There is something I never understood about this-- maybe you can clarify. This was always considered to mean that access would be automatically closed off or that force would be necessary or something

like that.

CHAYES: It was thought--and I suppose it is worth explaining that--it was thought that once the control of access was turned over to the East Germans, changes in access procedures, if not the cutting off of access, would occur, changes in access procedures which were designed to require recognition of the power and authority of East Germany. We kept saying we would not accept any changes in access procedure of dependence upon the East Germans, formal dependence on the East Germans, for access rights, although, of course, we depend on the East Germans in hundreds of ways for our access. Our whole rail access, for example, depends on the operation of the East German rail system.

GORDON: There were two probablys here. One is that they probably--nobody knew for sure they necessarily would--change access procedures. . . .

CHAYES: Well, I think if they turned the thing over to the East Germans, if they had gone that far. . . .

GORDON: But the East Germans were puppets we were told at the same time.

CHAYES: That's right. The notion was that if the East Germans, that you would use the puppet to make the change rather than make it yourself and then say, "I'm not responsible, deal with my puppet." Actually our--and this is where the problem where the possible use of force came in--our contingency planning provided for very little recognition of changes in procedures. There were some limited changes that we would accept, not because they recognized any authority or anything like that, but because they helped focus or narrow the issue on which we broke. And once that point arose, I think--I can't remember any longer what it was--but I think we were prepared to have our tickets stamped by an East German border personnel, but if there were any further overt intervention of the East Germans in the procedures, we were going to ignore them and move on. Well, all right. Then there the thought was if we did that that really challenged the other side to a forceful

response and that probably if they had gone that far there would be some kind of a forceful response, in which case the fat was in the fire. That is, maybe you could then choke it off--I now think in retrospect that obviously you could have since we choked it off really much earlier. But on the other hand, if all those steps had been taken it is perfectly clear it would have been a much more brittle and inflammable situation. I question whether once force had been committed by either side you could then call things off or bring it under control. This was a very touchy question. In any event, you had to contemplate that if this set of steps went through as the Russians threatened the signature of the treaty turning over the access to the Germans. . . .

GORDON: That is as much as they had threatened at that point.

CHAYES: Yes, that's right. But you had to contemplate that they weren't either then or six months from then or even a year from then, something was going to happen that we would not accept.

GORDON: But why wasn't that a separate issue?

CHAYES: Well, because--I don't know why it wasn't a separate

issue. Partly it was the crisis atmosphere that it engendered. Partly, I think, if you were sitting where we sat at that time you had to take the possibility of this sequence at a fairly high value. I don't say it was a certainty, but you had to take it at a fairly high value. In any event, I think, you are quite right when you say that the Acheson reaction was very much of an over-response to the situation. We were all very much concerned about it.

To get back to this afternoon, it was a Friday afternoon in early July; I went back to the Department, wrote a responding memorandum to the memorandum we had just worked out for the President, and got it directly to the Secretary of State. That is, I sent it to Foy Kohler so that he knew. There was nothing that happened behind his back or anything. As an Assistant Secretary you have a right to put a piece of paper on the Secretary's desk, and he ought to look at it. And he did, there is no question about it that he did. I have a feeling that it was an effective piece of paper. Our position was a strong

one at this point. I think most people recognized by this time that the Acheson thing was an over-response.

GORDON: Too much, too soon.

CHAYES: Yes, and people were groping for some way of balancing it. The obvious way to balance it was by some form of negotiating proposal. I think actually that weekend was the point at which, although no decision was made, the general feeling that we weren't going to follow the Achesonian line became accepted. I mean the President himself was certainly not sympathetic with it and that emerged at that time. And if it emerged for Rusk and McNamara, then it was pretty clear where we were going.

GORDON: Who else was he talking to? There was the White House group and. . . .

CHAYES: Well, McNamara a good deal. I'm sure Bob. . . .

GORDON: . . . belligerent.

CHAYES: Oh, I don't think any where near as belligerent as the Acheson line, except for Paul Nitze who was an Acheson graduate, so to speak. You recall that Nitze was the Chairman of the Policy Planning Staff during

Acheson's tenure as Secretary of State. The Security Council meeting the next week was, you know, as all those things are, not very decisive. What really was--what really did bring the matter to a head was the President's speech toward the end of July which, as you say, called forth quite a military response. We activated some National Guard divisions. We lengthened some terms of service; we--I don't think we increased the draft, maybe we did. We stopped short of proclaiming a national emergency. That's really what the issue finally boiled down to: Are we going to proclaim a national emergency or not? That was one half the issue. The other half of the issue was: Is the President going to say anything about negotiations? If you read that speech, about half of it was devoted to the possibility of a negotiated settlement, that we were always prepared to talk, that we weren't going to back down, but on the other hand we were prepared to talk. We had

grievances, problems that we were going to talk them out.

GORDON: Was that the speech with the fall-out shelter talk in it?

CHAYES: Maybe some of that was it, I'm not sure. It might have been about the same time. I'm not sure. Anyway, the bit increase in defense expenditure was about \$3 billion and. . . . Only the military side of the speech got played really in the papers. Not much of the other side got played at all. It was played on almost as though it had been an Achesonian speech in the newspapers. On the other hand, the fact that we didn't declare a national emergency--and that issue really went down to the wire--and the question became: What could you do if you declared a national emergency that you couldn't do if you didn't? I forgot what it was; there was one thing that you could do if you declared a national emergency, had something to do with calling up--I can't remember--we could call back

the reserves, and we did call back some of the reserve without a national emergency, but there was some measure relating to the expansion of the armed forces. Maybe it was expanding the total limit or something that could have been done by the President alone if he declared a national emergency. But everything else that we wanted to do we could do without it, so that on the whole the declaration of and the expansion could be done by legislative enactment without calling a national emergency. So on the whole the question of whether you are going to proclaim a national emergency became the psychological issue. You play it in that high key or in the next lower key. And in the end. . . .

GORDON: In general one gets the feeling as you talk of some wish to use as much strength as necessary to cope with the level of the crisis at this particular point without using up all your ammunition too soon and too big.

CHAYES: Well, I don't think we quite thought of it in those terms. There was what I call--for want of a better term and I know that it has a label quality about it--an Achesonian group inside the Government. It consisted of Acheson himself, of Walt Rostow and maybe Mac; I'm not sure where Mac Bundy stood in this one. He probably wasn't as ardent as Acheson but he probably was generally on that side of the equation. Foy Kohler, certainly. Maybe some others in the State Department. Paul Nitze in the Defense Department, who was a powerful man. Probably some people in the joint Chiefs who were for a very sharp response, extremely high keyed responses, completely confined to military reaction. And there was the other side that didn't approach it. Maybe the President approached it in a way that you are talking about, he probably did--he was more subtle than anybody--but I remember my own attitude towards the problem at that time. It was two-fold. One, to try to tone down the sharpness

or the stridency of the military side. As I say, the issue in the end narrowed down on that side to whether or not you were going to proclaim a national emergency. In the end our advice prevailed, and the President did not proclaim a national emergency. It had both, as I say, legal and psychological. . . . The other prong of my concern was to keep some indication that there was a negotiating pathway available if people wanted to avail themselves of it. The premise of Mr. Acheson's position was that there was nothing to negotiate, that talk was a sign of weakness and that we shouldn't talk about negotiations until after the test of ^{wills} ~~whills~~ had been resolved. Now this ultimately was the DeGaullist position. This was the French position. And you recall the French ultimately dissociated themselves from the Four Power approach, which was a negotiating approach, the Four Power exploratory approach. Indeed, in the end the French blunted and diluted the negotiating

approach so badly that they destroyed it, Whether it would have had any chance of success otherwise I now doubt in retrospect. I think, as I review, it, we managed to do about what could be done. That is, what I viewed at the time as an effort not to avoid the question, not to deal with the crisis but as a possible opening for a real revision of central European policy, a fairly fundamental revision of Central European policy. And what many others around the President--not in the State Department, Rusk never went this far--but others around the President believed was an opening for that. I think that was illusory as I now look back on it. There wasn't any chance of doing that at that time. And what we were really engaged in was a holding action, as I see it. It was a defensive action although we saw it then as an effort to act creatively in this area of policy. As I say, that was an illusion.

GORDON: Would you agree that with this, that really at that time all you could do was sort of make it clear that we were not going to be pushed around with the idea of subsequently something more creative might be done?

CHAYES: Well, no, I think in the end what, as I now see, all that could be done was just to cancel out the crisis, that's all. In fact, if it hadn't been for the setting which I have already described, which I have gone into at some length, the Bay of Pigs, the Vienna meeting and so on, I think there was a possibility in that summer of moving toward a revision of Central European policy. And if it hadn't been for the way Khrushchev posed it, which was in the most belligerent, demanding, arrogant kind of way, a way which made it hardest for us to respond.

Well, in any event as I say, when the President made his speech, half of it was devoted to negotiation, but none of that got into the newspapers.

Then about a week later there was a meeting of foreign ministers in--or two weeks later--in Paris to deal with the concerting of allied views on the crisis and the allied response to the crisis. By this time I was working in the Berlin group, and I want to explain what the Berlin group was. First, there was inside the State Department a Berlin Task Force that met daily.

GORDON: This was set up in June when the crisis began.

CHAYES: Well, it was really a response to the President's dissatisfaction with the earlier performance. I should say this wasn't only the State Department because since responses had to be concerted among all four major allies and consulted about in the NATO council there was a lot of clearance that had to be done and as we later showed this could be done quite rapidly, but the first time around the machinery was quite creaky and rusty and also there was a certain lethargy in the bureaucratic response the first time. So the President set up a Task

Force. There was a--that is the White House set up a Task Force--there was a little question about who was going to chair that Task Force for awhile. And for awhile there was some possibility that it might not have been chaired in the State Department. It would have been a disaster. But in the end Foy Kohler was made Chairman of the Task Force, and it operated on a daily basis. It met maybe an hour, maybe two hours a day. And there was a morning briefing ultimately, when it got into its most refined form.

GORDON: Who were these people?

CHAYES: Well, there were representatives of all parts of the State Department that were concerned.

GORDON: Like what?

CHAYES: Well, the European bureau, my office, the Planning Staff, the Bureau of Research and Intelligence, some others--I can't name all of them. Paul Nitze's staff from Defense. People sat on it from CIA. White House representatives and Bundy used to sit on it.

GORDON: They met in the State Department?

CHAYES: They met in the State Department.

GORDON: Did they move physically into a group of offices?

CHAYES: Yes, there was set up and there still exists, although it now is a shadow of its former self, a Berlin Task Force headquarters on the Seventh Floor. I don't know what they call it, the Situation Room or something like that was established at that time. A big conference room was especially set up on the 7th floor with control of access for the Task Force. It then became a general crisis room. The Operations Center I think developed out of that period.

GORDON: Do you think this kind of arrangement perhaps could add a sense of--I'm sure it facilitates communication--but does it add a sense of urgency to the crisis?

CHAYES: I'm sure it did, but I don't think the urgency grew from that kind of internal nourishment. The President was concerned. I do think there was a crisis, and you can argue about . . .

GORDON: Wasn't the President over-reacting?

CHAYES: No, I was just saying I do think there was a crisis. There is no question that Khrushchev, although he left himself a great deal of tactical and strategic flexibility, was prepared to drive down this road quite a long way to see what the theory looked like. And I think . . .

GORDON: Well, the Wall sort of indicated that.

CHAYES: Yes, of course I think the Wall in a way marked the beginning of the Russian retreat. That is the beginning of their seeing another way to deal with it, their problem or the problem they wanted to deal with, which was essentially how you shore up [Walter] Ulbricht's regime. And they saw that you could do it, in effect, by harsher kinds of police state measures, in which they participated rather than by international enhancement, you know, by giving them an international stature.

GORDON: Was this, in your opinion, the cause of the crisis, that so many people were running away?

CHAYES: No, I don't think--I think that developed later on. Actually, you will recall that although there had been a general flow out of East Germany at fairly steady although perhaps tolerable levels--I don't know how long they would have been tolerable--up until June when the crisis began, that is, when the Khrushchev memorandum became known. The curve of exodus just shot up very, very sharply so that I think really the fleeing of people from East Germany was more a symptom of the fundamental weakness of the regime which was really what concerned Khrushchev and what he was trying to deal with, rather than the cause of the concern. And in that sense the wall not only cut off the refugees but also began to handle some of the other problems.

In any event, again, to get back a little to the sequence of events. . . . Oh, I was talking about the Task Force. In addition to the Task Force, an Ambassadorial group of the three Ambassadors, the British, French, and

German Ambassadors in Washington, plus Kohler, met every afternoon on the Berlin situation. There were several more exchanges of notes in July. And we began to get those notes back in two or three days. I remember drafting a number of them myself and I remember that is really how I got into the group and into Foy Kohler's good graces. One time there was--I forget now what the incident was--but there was some incident that required a very quick response. I went off in a corner and drafted a note and it got approved by the Task Force and the Ambassadorial Group and the President and everybody else and the Secretary with very little change. It was short, snappy, punchy, undiplomatic kind of note. It may have been the second note, that is the one right after the weak one, or it may have been somewhat later. Everybody got congratulated on it. And from then on I was a regular member both of the Task Force and of the Ambassadorial group.

I saw the President a couple of times in this period, once in a plane--I forget where we were flying to or from [plane from Hyannis Port, late July]--in which he talked about, "If the issue is talking to the East Germans or having a war, we are obviously going to talk to the East Germans." I forget where I was with him when he made this statement very categorically. It was fairly early on in this thing so that in all of these operations that I have just been talking about, this sort of intra-Administration warfare, I had a sense that I was not undercutting the President or not proceeding along lines with which he was basically unsympathetic. Before the Foreign Minister's meeting there was going to be a meeting of the "Working Group," which was really a plenary session of the Ambassadorial Group, but the working group was a group of senior officials of the four countries who prepared the meeting for the foreign ministers; that is, they would develop papers which the--on policy which the foreign ministers would review

and either approve, modify or change. But the working group was to meet for a week or so in Paris before the foreign ministers meeting at the beginning of August. I talked to the Secretary and Foy and got assigned to the working group, so I was going to go with them. And it was just at this time that I saw the President and talked and had this conversation that I was just referring to. He said, "What are you doing?" I said that I had been working on the Berlin thing and was expecting to go over, and he said, "Well, I want to see all you people before you go." And we did have a meeting with the President just before the delegation to the working group went off. I think it was the only time I was ever in the family part of the White House. I think that was the only time. He took us upstairs and gave us drinks; the Secretary was there and Foy Kohler and myself and Marty Hillibrand, and Acheson was there and some others. So that instead of getting to be a small, open, conversation it had an air of formality about it, and he

didn't stress, as I think he had done privately to others, his desire that we work for some form of negotiating strategy to come out of the foreign ministers meeting. But he gave us enough lead and certainly Foy Kohler, as he worked in the working group, pushed in that direction. I now forget the details; again, this is all documented, our own position papers and the ultimate papers that came out of the working group and were passed on by the foreign ministers when they came. This happened in the first ten days of August, let's say. We pressed for a negotiating initiative. We wanted the foreign ministers on the 10th of August, let's say, to emerge from their conference and invite the Soviets to a Four Power conference. And there was a question of level and all of that sort of stuff. We certainly didn't want a summit to begin with, and there was a question whether you reconstituted a conference of deputy foreign minister or whether you start on the foreign

minister level or what. And we wanted the foreign ministers group when they left Paris, as they left Paris, to take a strong negotiating initiative to invite the Russians to a Four Power Conference. Now that the French blocked and the reason why the French had a effective veto here--there were both legal and political reasons--legally, they were one of the three powers with responsibility for Berlin. Politically, we couldn't do it without the French even if the Germans would have gone along. The Germans were actually more receptive to this kind of maneuver than the French were at the time. They were represented in the working group by [Karl] Carstens, who is a very able and very shrewd and flexible and liberal-minded man. He still is the permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office. And he is much more comfortable with [Gerhard] Schroeder, let's say, than he was with [Heinrich Von] Brentano. But this was his first appearance in that role and I'm not sure he was too--you know he was feeling his way

quite a bit and he didn't want to get in trouble back home and so on. In any event, the Germans were more receptive than one might have thought. The British were represented by [Lawrence R.L., Earl of] Scarborough who was a typical British Foreign Office guy, buttoned up in a way but really not--he didn't have great ability. Unfortunately, He is now their representative to NATO, which isn't where you put your best guy. The French were represented by a most wonderful man, Jean Lalois, who is one of their absolutely most brilliant people. He is the sort of head of their policy planning group to the extent they have one and their European . . .

GORDON: How do you spell that?

CHAYES: L-A-L-O-I-S. A superb guy, he looks like Juan Gabin, the movie actor. A very rugged, appealing, sympathetic guy. Later at the next meeting of the working group and later on in Washington he got in trouble because he went further in the direction of the U.S. position than his instruction warranted, or at least he probably

didn't have instructions; he would have stuck to them if he had them. He misgaged the temper of his principal. And since then he has really been submerged because his general approach was much more sympathetic with ours, although not wholly, not identical with ours, but much more sympathetic with ours than with the DeGaullish position of intransigence. But at the same time, his instructions then and I think his own views were that we ought to proceed much more cautiously than we, the Americans, were prepared to proceed. And so he was thoroughly in sympathy at that point with the French policy of deferral. The French just would not come along on this type of initiative; they--I forget exactly what the formula was--there was to be further study at a meeting later in Washington to consider the matter.

I should mention a little side issue. As we left for Paris, or the day or two before we left, Reston came out with a column in which--it was a very unfortunate column in which he

catalogued a lot of the kind of things that some of the more daring people in the State Department and in the White House were thinking of. I have to record that this was one of my early encounters with the press, and I didn't quite handle it as discreetly as I probably should have. I talked speculatively really a lot more than probably was wise, and they put it all in the column without attributing it to me but talking about some of the thinking that was going into the preparation of this foreign ministers meeting. That itself I think had bad effect because it was read in Paris, and it was read in a lot of places, and some of the stuff that I talked about and that appeared in the column was clearly way beyond bounds, and I had even said that it was. You know I didn't claim that it was a--that all of the possibilities were realistic. But I think it scared people in Paris as to what might be the results of a conference. So it was an unfortunate story in that sense. Although, as you look back again,

I don't think little things like that really fundamentally affected the course of events.

GORDON: I'm not clear; it was too far in what direction?

CHAYES: In the direction of change of Central European policy, altering the situation in Central Europe.

GORDON: Such as nuclear withdrawal.

CHAYES: Oh, no, none of that. I'm not sure; I would have to go back and look at the column.

GORDON: But it was not in the direction of belligerency.

CHAYES: No, no, it was in the direction of what kind of negotiations might you have. My position then and my position now is that we would be much better off if we had an agreed status at Berlin. To get the Russians to sign a new contract would be a very, very big event for us and would be worth giving up something for in terms of recognition of frontiers or non-aggression or what you will. I don't say exactly what you would give up, trade out for it. But that there was a great deal to be said for a Russian acknowledgement in

contemporary terms and a formal acknowledgement of the status of Berlin and the access to it. Now there was a lot of falderol about how that would weaken our position in Berlin, that we were better basing our "status" on rights deriving from occupation rather than from rights involving consent. I have never agreed with that, but some people have maintained that. In any event, what really changed the situation, as you said earlier, was the Wall. The foreign ministers meeting ended on the 10th or 19th or 8th of August. I forget which, and on the 13th up went the Wall. A couple of things, I keep wondering. . . .

GORDON: Did we issue the invitation?

CHAYES: No, we did not. The French simply refused. I forget what the communique said, but really the only thing it said was that the foreign ministers were going to meet again to pursue the matter in Washington before the General Assembly session in September. It would be

interesting to think now what would have happened if we had invited the Russians to a four-power conference on the 8th, whether the Wall would have gone up on the 13th. I can't conceive that it would, actually, because to have done that in the face of an invitation of this kind would have been such a belligerent and unresponsive move. At least the political cost of putting up the wall would have been immeasurably increased if that invitation had been outstanding. Maybe the Russians had no alternative but to put up the Wall. It is possible that by this time the flow of people had become so great that they had no alternative, but, as I say, the political cost of doing it would have been immeasurably increased if we had that invitation outstanding. The Wall went up and people say again, in retrospect, why didn't we make some move, you know, knock it down with tanks or something like that or make some sort of

forceful response. Of course, for the three or four days after the Wall went up we thought of nothing else but what kind of moves we ought to make in response to the Wall. We decided in the end that there was no appropriate response, that any response was either over reactive or under reactive. I guess what we did was send fifteen hundred troops to Berlin and the President and the Vice President Johnson which was not a terribly effective response, although it had some morale impact. In considering this I think you ought to remember a couple of things. First of all, the Wall was not a wall in the early days. We now think of it as masonry barricades. In the early days, in the first few days it was a barb-wire business with masonry only in a very few places. The first few days there were eighty crossing points in the wall and traffic back and forth was virtually uninterrupted except that it was channeled through the crossing points. The subway, I guess the elevated one, ran

back and forth between East Berlin and West Berlin, and people went back and forth very readily. It was over a period of about three or four weeks that the remaining openings were pinched off down to whatever it was, twenty, then five and then one, and the s-bahn was cut off, and the Wall was built up as a masonry wall. Well, I think it is important to remember that in retrospect. Because it wasn't just that people went to sleep and woke up in the morning with the Wall standing where there was no wall before. And a wall that could be knocked down. And a wall that was a hermetically sealed wall. It was an evolving wall in a way. Secondly, it was very clear that [Konrad] Adenauer and I would say, [Willy] Brandt, too, but Adenauer even more than Brandt, was very, very nervous at that point. I mean, he was nervous about a forceful response and didn't want a forceful response. He wanted everybody to keep his shirt on. So it was very hard, even if we had wanted to, which we didn't, to be more royal than the king. You know, this is

their country and their place and their interest and in their urging caution and restraint it is very hard for you to say, "No, let's get out there and punch them in the nose." But I just think in the end there wasn't any appropriate response. The notion that if you had knocked the Wall down that would have done it. . . .

GORDON: They had a right to build it. . . .

CHAYES: Well, a right. . . .

GORDON: Under the existing agreements.

CHAYES: We claim, and I think properly so, that the existing arrangements provided for free passage of people back and forth . . .

GORDON: A unified city.

CHAYES: . . . in Berlin. Well, not necessarily unified, but at least the people could go back and forth without interference. Now I suppose a wall with gates in it that permitted that was fully within their power. If you say, "Well, suppose we had knocked down the Wall, the Wall built right on the boundary like that?" Well, I think the

Russian response would have been very simply that they would have built the Wall fifty yards back or something like that. And then the question of going across the line in force to knock it down would have been a serious question. You know, the fifty yards makes a great deal of difference in this kind of thing. So the Russians--the potential of a Russian response to a forceful act on our part . . .

GORDON: The Wall I guess was implicit as soon as the city was divided in four sectors.

CHAYES: No, I don't think it was implicit. They had gotten along for a, you know, for. . . .

GORDON: Yes, but their right to build a wall.

CHAYES: Their right in a sense to do what they wanted, build a building or tear down a building in their sector . . .

GORDON: As soon as you had to define sector.

CHAYES: Yes, without our interfering.

GORDON: If the Administration had been set up without sectors. . . .

CHAYES: Well, of course, it was. The Administration of Berlin ~~Command de Tour~~ ^{Kommandatur} was four power representation on the Command de Tour, and that was supposed to rule all Berlin. The Russians walked out of the Command de Tour, I forgot when, back in the 40s or the 50s sometime, and the Command de Tour still operates for the three powers that still . . .

GORDON: Were the sectors defined originally?

CHAYES: Yes, the sectors were defined. But the sectors were defined in Vienna, you recall, but then they had three men in a jeep idea where all were patrolling and all activity was jointly carried out among the three occupying powers. That same system wasn't operative in Berlin. It is interesting to think what might have happened if it had been. In any event, you are right, in some sense this was territory which they disposed of, they could act on, and for us to stop them would require something like an invasion, even though they were violating

rights that we argued, and I think properly so, derived from the basic agreements under which the city was occupied.

But, in any event, I think the Wall was not an aggressive but a defensive act by the Russians, essentially. As I said earlier, it was a different way of trying to solve the situation. By the time the working group and the foreign ministers met again in Washington the question of real negotiation was almost moot. In fact, what happened out of that foreign ministers meeting was that Rusk was authorized--I shouldn't say authorized because what he did was say he was going to do it and the French weren't very happy about it even then but they could hardly stop him and I think they acquiesced in the end--Rusk said he was going to explore to see if there was a basis for negotiation with the Russians. And he did meet [Andrei A.] Gromyko three or four times at the beginning of September when the U.N. Assembly met, and Gromyko ultimately came to the White House and saw the Presi-

dent. But essentially by that time the impasse had become clear; the exchanges between Rusk and Gromyko simply defined the impasse. By this time the Russians were beginning to recede. In October at the party meeting in Moscow--well I think in September--already there were signs of year-end deadlines being abandoned and in October Khrushchev formally abandoned the year-end deadline that, as far as I was concerned and I think we even thought then, really marked the end of the crisis and the acquiescence of everybody in the status quo. Now it has been touchy off and on. Since then we have had problems in the air corridors; we have had problems on the autobahn, but in essence that marked, I think, a general acceptance of the status quo by both sides with the understanding that there were ways in which the Russians could--as Khrushchev later said to Harriman in the test-ban negotiations--in which he could step on our corn around Berlin. But that was really all it would

involve.

GORDON: Well, we are almost at the end of the tape.

CHAYES: Remind me on the next tape to tell you about the Berlin game which was really quite interesting.

GORDON: Did you say what you wanted to say about the Wall?

CHAYES: Yes.

GORDON: That is the end of this tape.